Categorizing the meanings of craft:
A multi-perspectival framework for eight interrelated meaning categories

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The meaning and value of crafts as bearers of the cultural heritage are widely acknowledged, and deserved attention has also been paid to the pedagogical applications of craft in practice. Still, research relating to subjectively interpreted meanings of crafts has remained rather scarce. The main interest of the study is to examine subjectively construed meanings of craft associated both to the self-reflective act of making and to the tangible craft object, and categorize the discovered meanings into representative categories. In presenting a multi-perspectival framework for the categories that portray the common kinds of meanings that crafts have, a substance that surpasses cultural boundaries is also captured due to the multicultural research setting. The primary empirical data of the study are composed of interviews of six women from different cultural backgrounds; the supporting data feature a participant observation of a multicultural craft activity group and photographic notes.

The wide range of different meanings captured from the data is, during the conducted qualitative content analysis, critically classified into representational categories that typify the personally experienced meanings. The analysis revealed eight interrelated meaning categories regarding the meanings of craft that go beyond cultural boundaries: Meanings proceed from the subjective process of interpreting craft in a socially constructed, personalized setting, but still the meanings given to craft have been given similar characterizations in the several cultural contexts examined. This study adds to an understanding of how personalized meanings contribute to building intercultural reciprocity.

Keywords: craft, culture, meanings, interculturality, meaning making

Background and theoretical perspective

Being part of material culture, crafts are inescapably incorporated into wider social discourses. These discourses, according to Ian Woodward (2007, 4), relate to "extensively held norms and values enshrined in norms and social institutions", and thus they also emphasize an interpersonal, communicative capacity. Therefore, the interest in crafts as material culture objects is tied up with the ability to carry personal and emotional meanings, facilitate interpersonal interactions and mediate both self-identity and social space (Woodward 2007, 4–5; Berger 2009, 81). Still, besides inhering into this complex social discourse, craft, as well as craftsmanship, still requires much detailed know-how, knowledge of skilled work and attained expertise.

The present article thus focuses on the subjectively interpreted meanings of craft, which are rooted in experiences of making, using and 'consuming' the products (see e.g. Miller 2009): the intangible heritage and vernacular traditions are seen to carry meanings both to the makers and the users of the products. Interweaving with cultural heritage, the elements of a handcrafted artefact carry meanings enhanced by tradition (Lappalainen 2011, 130). Tradition, on that account, is engaged in crafts both in material and immaterial level; both in terms of patterns of colours, forms and figures, but as well as of patterns of interpretation, reflection and social interaction. These considerations suggest the idea that whether an object of craft is regarded as a traditional form of cultural expression or an output of a contemporary society, it still

plays an important role in the processes of expressing cultural significance and mediating the personal values and strong meanings placed on crafts (Kokko & Dillon 2010; Luutonen 2008).

Defining craft is a problematic task because the word 'craft' has changed meaning over many centuries (Lucie-Smith 1981, 11; Dormer 1997, 5). During the earlier years, the emphasis revolved around the role of the corporal hand-making and technological function of craft; also the proximity between craft and art has been in the focus of the definitions. From a practical standpoint, craft is seen to allude to the communion of form, material, technique and aesthetic expression (Risatti 2007), but further it has a deeper connotation of a holistic process of making, which emphasizes the role of the maker (Pöllänen 2009, 251). As Paula Owen (2005, 30) has observed, some fragments, at the present, still remain from the ideology which sought to re-unite art and labour in craft: Firstly, practising crafts usually appears as a manner of preserving traditional skills and ways of working; secondly, craft has the ability to bring people together around shared experiences over time, and thirdly, craft can provide ways for ordinary people to interact with creative, handmade objects. In her notions, she embraced an institutional perspective on crafts, as opposed to Larry Shiner (2012) who instead wished to distinguish craft as a set of disciplines defined by material, technique or product, from craft as a process and practice characterized by four factors; corporal knowledge, materiality and making, skill, and functionality.

However, recent proposals have highlighted the meaning and value of crafts within culture and society (see e.g. Reubens 2010; Sam 2011, Gautlett 2011). In this regard, Sirpa Kokko and Patrick Dillon (2010) have studied the meaning-related cultural reverence of crafts and have examined crafts as reflections of both individual experiences and collective values. The foremost statements in their hierarchy of values placed on crafts were connected to themes of self-expressiveness, culturality and the social nature of crafts. Similarly, Rachel Mason (2005) has linked the meanings and values of home-based crafts to personal wellbeing, household economics, gift-giving, social circles, family traditions and worthwhile leisure activity. The notions made in this article substantiate both views, but the author's intent is to re-focus the prevailing classifications through presenting a body of categorized meanings that embraces meanings as culture-bound constructions.

The main purpose of the study is to examine subjectively construed meanings of craft which find their existence in a subject's participation in self-reflective acts of doing crafts and the outputs of those acts; processes and products alike; and categorize the discovered meanings into representative types. By categorizing the meanings given to crafts on a general level, this article offers new information on the nature of craft that goes beyond cultural boundaries: the informants of the study come from various cultural backgrounds, and thus, a substance that surpasses cultural norms may be captured in categorization. Therefore, this article aims to respond to the specified research question: Which can be identified as the common kinds of meanings that crafts have? A search for a transcendental substance is an underlying objective, and therefore, by proposing a multi-perspectival framework for the meanings of craft, this article also aims to contribute to the current discussion of intercultural bridging.

With regard to the relation between culture and human agency, I am forced to operate with some adjacent concepts that need to be carefully considered. In this article, "multicultural" is meant to suggest interplay and communication between different cultures at any level in general; "intercultural", in other hand, relates to a cross-cultural attitude that emphasizes interconnecting across and among cultural realms, and allows all cultural expressions to manifest themselves in their creative richness (García 2011). "Transcultural" discourse includes an idea of reciprocal transformation, a perspective that fosters recognition between us and the other, and therefore, "transcendental" is meant to suggest commonalities across the boundaries of the various cultures.Still, all these definitions remain somehow ambivalent as they emphasize the notions of coherence,

unity and continuity that typify a certain realm of culture (see e.g. Friese 2006). In order to capture the transcendental, a shared medium of understanding and communication needs to be vigorously encouraged.

Sherry Schofield-Tomschin and Mary A. Littrell (2001, 42) have observed that handcrafted objects communicate meanings both to the producers and the owners of the items. Although they focus on textile objects, their perception of the meanings of crafts is very similar that of the present article. I argue that crafts are regarded as meaningful objects, whether they are self-made objects which also feature the meanings gained through making, or objects made by someone else. *Self-made craft objects*, as finished items or yet unfinished outputs, are rooted in the self-reflective act of doing and making; *objects made by someone else*, in other hand, are often received as gifts or purchased or souvenirs, and therefore tend to carry shared meanings and interpretations of the cultural heritage. As traditional craft products, objects made by someone else are often identified with the concept of vernacular, which refers to the cultural production of a community and to collectively understood meanings, especially in rural communities (Greenhalgh 1997, 31; 35). On that account, traditional crafts operate as modes of contextualized knowledge which maintain a sense of folkloric ideology and contribute to personal histories (Lucie-Smith 1981; Metcalf 1997; Johnson & Wilson 2005; Sam 2011; Tzanidaki & Reynolds 2011).

Traditional crafts also seem to have the ability to harness and productize cultural heritage in terms of touristic souvenirs. As the symbolic role of souvenirs is to materialize self-identity and mediate our sense and memory of place (Morgan & Pritchard 2005), they operate as self-reflective modes of understanding culture. By purchasing souvenirs, we seek to add value; to expand our world views, differentiate the self from others and to sample authentic cultural life (Anderson & Littrell 1995). When handmade products can negotiate quality and tailored worthiness (Luutonen 2008), products with mass tourism quantity remain implying the most salient components of tradition (Moreno & Littrell 2001). Still, a product that is seen to symbolize a nation's state does not have to pursue authenticity in a strict sense; instead it is enough that the product acts as a platform for reaffirming the experiences on tradition, and that it merges these experiences onto the communality of the nation (Edensor 2004; Helgadottir 2011). In that sense, handcrafted products that are seen to convey the vernacular substance emphasize the subjective interpretation, understanding and reclaim of cultural values.

In the present article, I started by introducing the theoretical framework. Next I continue by presenting the empirical data and the qualitative content analysis conducted. On that basis, I propose a typifying division of meanings into eight interrelated meaning categories, each articulated independently. Finally, I conclude with my reflections on the results of the study conducted.

Data collection and empirical investigation

The study follows the perspective of narrative inquiry, which is a method to study how people experience the world, make sense of random experiences and create meaning for their lives in terms of narratives (Connelly & Clandinin 1990). In this study, narrative structures provide insights into how people come to understand their attitudes and appreciations toward crafts through individualized meanings that are articulated verbally and visually. Therefore, the process of inquiry mostly concerns the retrospective telling of informants' relationship to crafts (Howie et al. 2004, 448), but visual and tactual elements also support the inquiry.

In qualitative research, it is crucial to select informants carefully due to the assumption that the informants are able to provide information on the researched phenomenon. The primary empirical data are composed of unstructured interviews of six women from different cultural backgrounds; four of the interviews were carried out in the interviewees' homes, two in semi-public spaces. The predetermined criteria in finding interviewees was the interest towards craft culture or hobby crafts, ethnic background in the Finnish cultural context and

an ability to articulate Finnish or English. Access to potential interviewees was achieved by participation of hobby craft courses in local crafts center, local networks related to craft and cultural activity or word of mouth. All interviewees were craft-hobbyists of some kind: Some had enrolled to leisure time craft courses during their lives, some practiced crafts home or with friends. One of the interviewees had earlier worked as a seamstress in clothing industry, and one had a degree in art and design; others had very diversified occupational backgrounds. What was common to all of them was their attitude towards crafts, as they all considered themselves as persons interested and keen on crafts.

The interviews focused on finding out the meanings experienced on the domain of craft. All interviews were open, unstructured thematic and loosely followed the pre-arranged framework of three thematic topics of home country, craft interests and cultural traditions. The first topic focused on local features of craft culture of the home country; the following topic explored interviewees' memories in engaging crafts and their family traditions. The last topic gave attention to cultural values and social, economic, or political influences in craft traditions of the home country. In this final phase of the interviews usually involved visual aspects such as showing craft products brought from the home country.

By conducting these unstructured interviews, the aim was to examine the process of making meanings in a craft context and by capturing the meanings given to craft, add to an understanding of how personalized meanings contribute to building an intercultural reciprocity. Table 1 describes interviewees' relationship to the Finnish cultural context by showing the age bracket, the years lived in Finland, and the nations of origin.

Table 1: Summary of the background information of all interviewees.

Alphabetical code	Nation of origin	Age bracket	Years lived in Finland
A	Uruguay	40–55	< 5
B	Peru	40–55	15
C	Slovakia	40–55	18
D	Karelia	> 70	originally from Finland
E	Tanzania	40–55	25
F	England	55–70	>35

In addition, the interview data are accompanied by the supplemental data of participant observation and photographic material that has been collected from the observation groups and from interview situations. The role of this supplemental data is ancillary and supportative. This set of data offers to assist capturing a fragment of free-flowing association that may occur in creative occasions where people meet and discuss without having a pre-determined agenda for a discussion. Some representative quotes from group conversations are, therefore, applied to the result section, as they have managed to capture a vivid example that describes the category in focus.

The supplemental data consist of two audio-taped group conversations and participant observation data of a multicultural craft group of thirty participants, collected from a voluntarily organized craft group of the Finnish Red Cross, local-neighbourhood division in Eastern Helsinki, Finland. The participant observation data were collected over six three-hour biweekly sessions in spring 2010, and group conversation 1 was audio-taped in the last session. The participants of the craft group, all women, came from different nations: the majority had Somali backgrounds, while the rest represented Iran, Palestine, Iraq, Iran and Sudan and several Kurdi nations. Group conversation 2 was audio-taped in a collaboratively organized craft exhibition of a local Karelian Society in the city of Lahti, in which the majority of the participants were elderly evacuees

from the Karelia region or their middle-aged offspring, aged mostly 60-85 years. Similar to interview data, the supplemental data is transcribed and cautiously read several times during the analysis.

Gender-relativity is also a question to be considered when regarding the culture-bound processes in crafts, especially in the field of textile crafts. Hence, textile making and home-based crafts are historically and contemporaneously considered to affiliate with female realm (Hardy 2005; Mason 2005; Johnson & Wilson 2005; Grace et al. 2009; Kokko 2009; Helgadottir 2011). In the present study, all informants were women, as well as the researcher, and thus becoming conscious of this unavoidably unequivocal standpoint of femininity is crucial. Femininity is, therefore, a story within a story: a perspective on my own engagement with the world in the field of craft among women (see Hardy 2005, 176). Although the present study is not strictly lean on feminism, it certainly is a perspective worth consideration. The realm of home-based crafts or 'feminine-identified crafts' (Mason 2005) operated as a shared space between the researcher and the informants and thus promoted the reciprocal understanding over the plausible cultural differences.

Methods and analysis

Data analysis consisted of two main steps. First, a qualitative content analysis, a combination of data-driven and theory-driven approaches, was used to make sense of the transcribed data. In qualitative content analysis, the classified categories are derived from the analysed data and generated at least partially inductively, usually merging data- and theory-driven angles of reasoning. According to Francesca Moretti et al. (2011), a qualitative content analysis is a suitable analysis technique for classifying and the coding the textual data and presenting it in frames of typified categories constructed of similarly interpreted meanings. At this stage, a wide range of different meanings was found in the set of data.

By using the qualitative content analysis the author has aimed at uniform comparative methods of coding and interpreting the data. In interpreting the data, my own experiences, being part of my own understanding, were engaged. This means that analysis is a continuous process of making decisions and reframing the research itself (Wolcott 1994). The validity of the analysis is therefore ensured by complying with a methodical and meticulous close reading and with a systematic coding process consequent upon the examination (Hsieh & Shannon 2005; Forman and Damschroder 2008).

Framing categories was the second step. Each transcription with notes for analyzed meanings was read carefully several times. Notes with coloured highlights were then grouped into larger themes. This phase was very significant for the analysis: it proved that the generalized meanings did not rely on the propositions for products and processes, but could include meanings deriving from both material and imaginary praxis. In interpreting the data, a process of interweaving the perspectives of both respondent and the interviewer was also a crucial phase, as the interpretation proved to be dialogic and reciprocal (Mishler 1999; Riley & Hawe 2005). In the early stages of interpretation, the interview data dominated close readings, but as the analysis forward, ethnographic observation data proved helpful to find names for the meaning categories. Nonetheless, transcribed talk is the principal material in the analysis, since meanings always embody an internal, personal aspect: They are something that is expressed, indicated and intentioned, and in the cultural dimension, communicated through the use of language. Therefore, as meanings cannot be uncovered solely from visual or observational data, the main attention has been paid to interviews. Supplemental data has obliged mainly the process of identifying the categories. A key aspect of the following categorization of meanings was the process of interweaving the analysed talk, observations and literature, and by so doing, establishing a reciprocal dialogue between data and theory. This process also relates to issues of validating the set of inquiry.

Presentation of results

The analysis revealed a variety of personalized meanings given to craft that proceed from the subjective experiences. This wide range of different meanings is, during the conducted analysis, critically classified into representational categories that typify the personally experienced meanings. Figure 1 illustrates the construction of eight interrelated, partially overlapping types of meanings which were discovered in the analysis: the meanings of crafts are thus divided into functional, material, aesthetic, expressive, multi-sensory, experiential, collaborative and narrative categories. These types, assigned as *meaning categories*, capture both the meanings of self-reflective making and the meanings gained through the use of craft products.

The principal idea of meaning categories is to offer general names for different in-personal meanings that are traced from the analyzed data. Because of their personal nature, meanings are versatile and multifaceted constructions that are outcomes of one's individual sets of values, life histories and social interaction. Since objects may play and encode varying roles for every individual and their meanings are not exhausted in their immediate function (Berger 2009, 49; Morgan & Pritchard 2006, 32), meanings are emphasized differently by every informant: some categories can be regarded as exceedingly important or personally relevant; some other categories may remain viewpoints of little value. Therefore, this framework is not a stable composition, but instead a multi-perspectival frame which, by portraying the typifying categories, aims to enhance the understanding of the meanings embodied in crafts. For this reason, meaning categories interrelate and partially overlap. Every category extends to a range of personalized meanings and appreciations, all interpreted subjectively. Individually signified meanings, for example, how one perceives usability or objecthood, may get different remarks or emphasis among certain categories, but still depict the same, generally identified phenomenon behind a certain category.

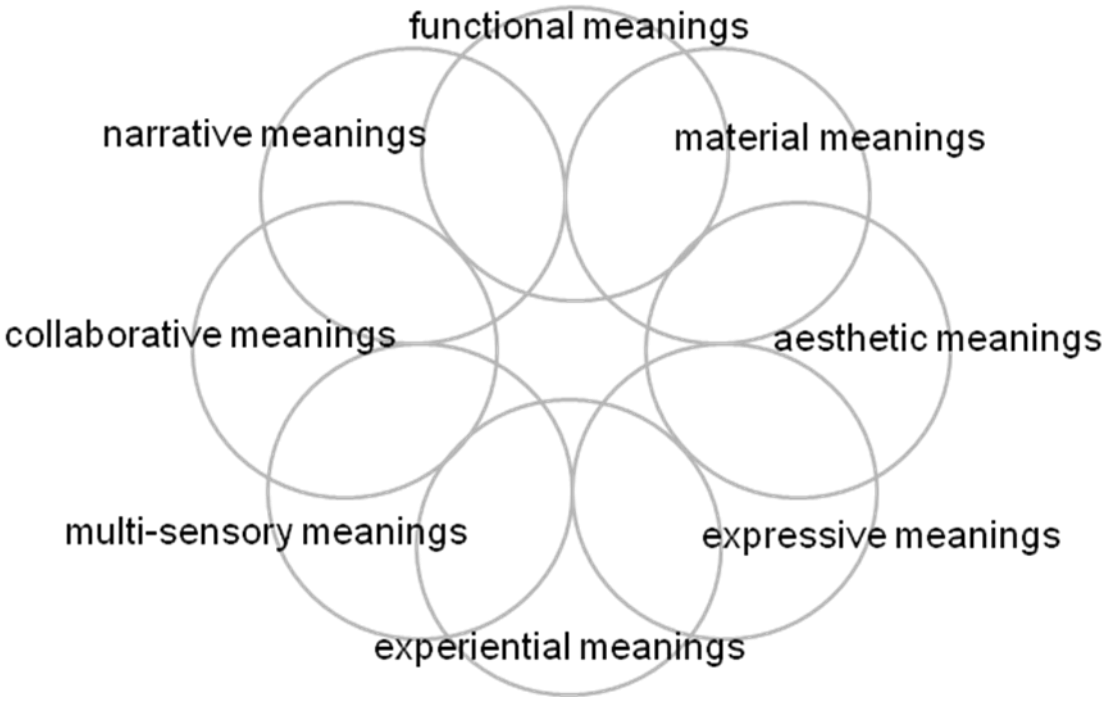

Figure 1: The interrelated meaning categories: a multi-perspectival framework for the meanings of craft.

Due to the multicultural orientation of the data; since informants came from different cultural backgrounds; these meaning categories profile appreciations and values related to craft that surpass cultural boundaries. Outlining this transcendental substance is an intrinsic aim in this kind of multicultural study, though this

study does not aim to contribute immediately to the issues of immigration or to strategies of assimilation. Conversely, it aims to portray craft as a relevant tool of creating interaction and mutual understanding, and mediating and maintaining the experiences of the inherent collectivity. The following sections present a detailed description of eight identified meaning categories as for the basis of discussion.

Functional meanings

Functionality is a multifaceted concept which combines meanings with the usability and utility of an object, but similarly intersects the notions of suitability and sustainability, which always take shape in relation to the object's user and social life (Lucie-Smith 1981, 7). As Sally J. Markowitz (1994) has noted, craft objects tend to imply practical functions; the pragmatic aesthetics were likewise emphasized in the data analysis. In the data, functionality was often described as a part of useful products, such as mittens, rugs or pots, while more decorative items came to assume an atypical form of functionality. Functionality was mentioned by all of the informants at some level, and accordingly, it appeared as one of the foremost categories mentioned. The function was often highlighted in the interviewees' observations concerning traditional craft products and their purchase, or the proper suitability of the self-made products:

> "You need to be able to drink from it," (interviewee A)
> "The rocking chair mat fits in its place very well, it was the right length and skilfully done," (interviewee D)
> "Baskets . . . which are made and brought, these are interesting, and each type of baskets had their own function and meaning to them." (interviewee C)

For several of the interviewees, crafts played the role of concrete mementoes of their faraway country of origin and brought distant memories closer in place and time. Function is therefore not a question of utility or maintenance alone but also a question of resources, interests, capabilities and prospects. In the observation data functionality seemed to intersect with the cultural folklore traditions of decoration. Therefore, it can be argued that function not only relates to pragmatic aspects but also to means of incorporeal, latent function and applied pragmatics (Berger 2009, 53; Luutonen 2008; Helgadottir 2011). Thus, the function of a craft may allude to an immaterial praxis and emotive spirit boosted by the act of doing and making. Although functional meanings are closely tied to aesthetics and narratives, they represent a range of practical knowledge. Still, besides this technical know-how, this knowledge related to functional aspects also has deep references to feelings of competence, successful making and suitability for a certain use.

Material meanings

Materiality features meanings related to material things people encounter, interact and use (Woodward 2007, 3). Therefore, as being human-made creations, all handcrafts inseparably inhere in the stream of material culture. Indeed, material meanings refer to social and cultural contexts among which the objects of craft are counted (Harvey 2009, 7). Materiality, as a meaning category, embraces personal expressions and values materialized in tangible objects and mediated in mastery and crafted skill. As a concrete attribute, the material can act as a source of inspiration and motivate the making, as portrayed in the interview data:

> "And most importantly inspiration comes from the materials, if I see some nice yarn or fabric in the store, usually it begins from that, like what could I do with that." (interviewee F)

According to the analysis, material meanings increase in value when they concern the use and consumption of tangible products. Also, the economic aspects of crafts are evident in regard of materiality. This means that

in order to be worth purchasing, a handcrafted object must respond to the requirements of both the seller and the buyer, just as mass-produced products must. Therefore, regarded from the viewpoint of materiality, the object embodies a certain face of profitability. In evoking associations of profitability, aesthetic quality and suitability for use, a tangible material plays truly a weighty role: premium materials readily associate with high-quality craft and thus intertwine with the idea of skilful making. This interconnection is suggested by one interviewee:

> "But yeah I appreciate it, and said that sure . . . a little higher level, these I respect. These won't do for a reason, that these are hand crafted, and this is nice, I want to see something more [laughter] is there something done or is there some idea, or some quality material." (interviewee C)

As Bruce Metcalf (1997, 70) observed, craft cannot be dematerialized; it always somehow relates to physical world. Materiality has much to do with mattering – making matter and having special significance, performing relations of power and constructing selfhood (Woodward 2007, 9). Mattering, however, alludes here also to this stream of sentimentally associated heritage, and to a rather diffused concept of making sense, which involves a variety of manners according to the production, possession and use, as well as the meaning making in a culturally oriented sense. It is commonly argued that the meanings of material culture result from the creativity of inventing, designing, using and reproducing things that are shared by humans (Miller 1998; Korkiakangas et al. 2008, 8). Material thus acts as a concrete agent by intertwining the tangible with what is subjectively reflected in crafts.

Aesthetic meanings

Aesthetics involve certain features that contribute to both looking and performing right in the mind of the beholder (Dormer 1997, 225; Danto 1994, 383). Kokko and Dillon (2010) also itemized aesthetic qualities in crafts, although aesthetics in their notions did not stand out as a primary value in craft. In this analysis, aesthetic meanings were closely tied to categories of experientiality, expressivity and functionality. However, aesthetic meanings were particularly evidenced in the interview data in which all the informants prominently described their notions of values in many of the personal statements. Thus, aesthetic meanings appeared profusely in terms of selfhood; they seemed to provide grounds for the value of particular craft objects, and therefore encouraged the craftspeople to produce objects that they believed to have aesthetic validity for them as craftmakers:

> "It's really beautiful, that kind of bright red and grey figures, are nice." (interviewee B).

Besides this kind of immaterial self-reflection on the outputs, aesthetic meanings suggest technical competence, faultlessness and a fastidious, skilled hand, all of which result from the knowledge of making.

> "This lace so nicely bobbined . . . and it's done with this absolutely thin string!," (quotation from group conversation 2)

In homes, handcrafted objects, such as small sculptures, 'self-gifts' or souvenirs bought from vacations or from the faraway home country, often decorate and identify (Morgan and Pritchard 2006). For the informants, handcrafted objects represented a homely atmosphere, and concurrently uphold cultural representations: they were seen as artefacts through which cultural identities were negotiated, maintained and endorsed. This confirms the importance of tangible craft objects as bodies of personal values and memories of places. The interplay between the physical elements and what is valued is echoed in aesthetic meanings that reflect the personal values, the skills and the creativity of the craftsmaker, and in parallel, support the ideas of meeting the practical expectations for the outputs.

Expressive meanings

Expressive meanings deal with the forms and contents of self-initiatedness and expression, and hence have some specific features which suggest artistic and self-reflective activity (Howie et al 2004; Riley 2008). Also, they relate closely to aspects of creativity, which is seen to provide a wide range of psychosocial benefits and nurture the ideas of self-worthiness and identity maintenance (Schofield-Tomschin & Littrell 2001; Perruzza & Kinsella 2010; Tzanidaki & Reynolds 2011). According to the analysis, expressivity concerns the manner in which people come to understand themselves, how they come to express who they are, and how they communicate implicitly with others, as reflected in one of the interviewee's remarks:

> "So you can paint and sew at the same time, it's very inspiring . . . so what I enjoy most is a little bit of art, artistic patchwork, so not only a little quilt alongside a pattern. Maybe the selection of colours is more blueish and the like, that's what I used to use more sunny colours." (interviewee F)

In the supportative data, expressive craft-making seemed to enable many participants to express their thoughts and reconfirm their identities through creative making. For some, this expressive form of craft-making nurtured their personal histories and feelings of continuity in a foreign cultural context. Meditation on the past still remained nostalgic:

> "My aunt was very artistic, as was I when I was younger, but then a few decades went by before I started again . . . I'm an reborn handicrafts woman and I recommend it." (quotation from group conversation 2)

The expressive meanings reflected via traditional craft objects derived largely from personal preferences; for example, using these traditional craft objects in home furnishings or by wearing certain clothes bought from home region, the person was able feel empowered, and to express and act upon herself. The notion of self-identity was highlighted in this category, as self-discovery and personal lifestyle choices gained much attention (see Morgan & Pritchard 2006, 32). For several of the interviewees, the embodiment of their unique origins was frequently expressed in their daily habits at home: their personal styles, especially in clothing, often included many products made of traditional materials using mostly traditional techniques, such as crochet in Peru, but which still represented a modern vision of contemporary street style clothing. It can be briefly concluded that expressive meanings are echoed in personal style, even though expressivity also has a deep connection to social integration and differentiation and the formation of self-esteem.

Experiential meanings

In the process of experiencing craft the concept of 'experience' alludes to subject's internal interpretation of her experienced world and to the malleability of perceptions within and by crafts. Arguing for the experiences materialized in crafts, Jill Riley (2008) has stated that textile making enhances individual identities and supports a sense of the self and of continuity in collectivities. Similarly to Riley, many now argue for this thematic in textile making, where experiences are used as sources of creative craft-making (Perruzza & Kinsella 2010; Pöllänen 2011) or narrative reflection (Howie et al. 2004; Mäkelä & Latva-Somppi 2011). According to the analysis, experiential meanings arise from associations of mundane experiences, and they implicitly knit together cognitions and emotions related to everyday activities. In the data, experiences originated in the innermost part of an individual being and were embellished by personalized history cultures and the landscapes of the mind. Crafts were seen as reflective platforms which were able to carry and sustain cultural associations that had been gradually developed and personified over time.

> "All these things related to handicraft products . . . to me are somewhat familiar and I respect them, and I started respecting them only once I came to Finland, an odd way to say it [laughter]. Then, maybe everything was too close." (interviewee B)

Experiential meanings are oriented to reflect identities, witnessed experiences, affinities, personal relationships and family traditions; they are oriented to reflect what is experienced. Therefore, what could be examined about experiential meanings relied upon what was told in the interview sessions. In the interview data, the practices of giving and receiving crafts as gifts were noticed as manners that usually made things special in a meaningful, personalized way, as argued by one informant:

> "A near relative has made me this kind of bobbin lace, which is like a horse, or its shape is similar to a horse, it's something difficult that pattern. I don't understand lacemaking deeply, but... these are examples which are really difficult to make. But they are very valuable, and old things are coming back, as can be seen from this new type of bobbin lace." (interviewee C)

This orientation suggests that the interplay between real-world praxis and imagination; so to say, between the practical experience of making objects, and the cultural conventions of perceiving them; derive from the individualized, alternative worlds. As for encultured knowledge, experiential meanings connect to social continuation and to shared experiences and thus relate to experiences of belonging to a cultural flow. Experiencing crafts means, therefore, providing a way of having importance in life, to leave ones fingerprint in world, as Marketta Luutonen (2008, 332) has portrayed.

Multi-sensory meanings

Following Metcalf's (1997, 77) notion of sensibility materialized in craft, multi-sensory meanings respond to a set of individual capabilities and sensitivities which differ from one individual to another. For the sensing and experiencing individual, the senses are manifested in emotive reflections, as visual, verbal and auditory responses to making: in touching, in a familiar way, the material and its texture, in smelling the scent of the felted wool or in hearing the clicking of knitting needles. In multi-sensory meanings, the embodied skills of making things are highlighted: they are meanings directly or indirectly related to making and expressing the human mind (Risatti 2007, 178–179). In self-reflective acts of making, making itself is at the core; still, producing finished objects sometimes seemed less important than making experiments with a tangible material:

> "Pretty often I have this feeling that the act is more important than the end result, so that it's enjoyable when making it." (interviewee F)

Multi-sensory meanings relate to the corporal act of doing crafts. In the data, crafts seem to foster versatile values: they can offer opportunities to practice skills and be trained towards mastery or just play an important role in contributing subjective well-being as a leisure time activity or hobby (Howie et al 2004; Mason 2005; Reynolds & Kee 2006; Pöllänen 2011). Gaining a sense of purpose, experiencing achievement and enhancing self-management are some of the psychosocial benefits of craft making (Harris 2008): those aspects were included in many of the informants' explanations as part of having time for oneself when doing crafts. The participants argued several times that by crafting, they were able to have a short moment just for themselves and concentrate on nothing else but crafting. Thus, feelings of personal competence and achievement show strongly in the present data. As described by one interviewee:

> "So that some amount of clothes pieces I'd want, different from other's clothes . . . and then you would actually make them, cause… it's nice to try and make experiments by sewing things." (interviewee C)

Still, making can also be a meaningful matter indirectly, as was reflected in several interviews. Much value was placed on craft making in situations in which an individual did not have the capability to make an object on her own but still had a deep respect towards the skilful act of making. Therefore, the skilful act is seen as a

principal mediator of these multi-sensory meanings related to making, although still, besides individual resources, they can support cultural and social aspects and appreciations.

Collaborative meanings

Collaborative meanings deeply bound with the concept of culture, and thus they provide the frames in which objects are reflected, valued and used (Miller 1998; Woodward 2007). Being cultural is being social: being in a relationship between a certain group of people and the immediate environment, which takes in both the conventions of producing and consuming as well as the values, beliefs and structures that uphold these conventions (Kokko & Dillon 2010). The social feeling of belonging to a particular realm of culture was exhibited in the data in two ways. First, crafts involved a cultural level of collectivity, which included the social practices of the country of origin. This domain of collaborative meanings sustained the intangible attributes of national heritage and cultural identity, as the following quotation demonstrates:

> "These were those, which I chose, and which in my mind are very typical and traditional, let's say that at home we have a lot of Finnish and Slovenian handicrafts. The Slovenian handicrafts tend to be more traditional, while the Finnish handicrafts tend to be more modern." (interviewee C)

Secondly, collaborative meanings deal with the social practices related to crafts. This social dimension of craftmaking appeared on the communal level, nurturing the feeling of togetherness which developed in a particular group of people practicing crafts together. Riley (2008) has examined this sense of unity and *belonging* in textile making through guild participation, where members of the guild develop a 'collective self' that reflects the group's norms and characteristics. In the present data, the collaboration was fostered in craftmaking in a shared environment through a commonly shared, non-verbal language of making, as described by one interviewee:

> "I tried to make something, but when trying to make it yourself, and you don't have any friends around who also are making them, so it'd be this kind of emptiness, so I'm very satisfied that I've recently found this craft course." (interviewee F)

The observational data support both views on collaboration. On one hand, craftmaking provided a framework for encountering and helped to stitch up the cultural gap. On the other hand, craftmaking as a self-identified activity needs a collective atmosphere which encourages people to find shared interests (Gautlett 2011). Since the category of collaborative meanings has a temporal character, it shows itself as a socially organized and performed construction driven by intrinsic needs and motivations, interaction and relived intersubjectivity (Riley 2008).

Narrative meanings

Approaching indigenous meaning-making, Richard Kabiito (2010, 22) considered narratives as "non-real things"; as imaginary things which keep the mind wondering while the real things keep it in balance. For Kabiito, non-real things act in conceptual level, the same which Roland Barthes (1977) called the symbolic level or the level of signification; the level in which the meaning comes to seek out the subject, and then presents itself quite naturally to the mind. According to the data, narrativity performed the task of interweaving the lived experiences perceived from an individual horizon with historically interpreted traditions: as manners of relating and understanding that serve as the foundation of people's worldviews (Sam 2011, 317). A similar connection has also been noted by Joyce Starr Johnson and Laurel E. Wilson (2005), who have stated that traditional crafts contribute to a sense of personal history and personal identity. Craft has

the ability to commemorate and act as a tool of transmitting the social memory (Halbwachs 1992), as one group conversation pointed out:

> "I'm from Hiitola, this kind of pattern [which she assigns to Hiitola], when I was young, I had a miniskirt made from this kind of multi-coloured knit pattern. It was made from the ends of the yarn, a so-called northern light skirt. It was red and such." (quote from group conversation 2)

The data highlighted a surge of longing which was evident in several of the craftmakers. For them, crafts raised good memories from the past.

> "Then here is the dress made by the same person, which her daughter remembers from photographs showing off the skirt on her mother, such a tiny dress, so it's been slim girls back in the day – wearing this on Laatoka's beach – this is as light as a feather." (interviewee D)

The narrative meanings contained free-flowing expressions that reflect the innermost part of the individual being. From that point of view, crafts also refer to personal experiences of being absent from current cultural landscapes, traditions or contexts. Recollection can thus make an appearance in personal level, as an emotional narrative, as described by one interviewee:

> "Seamstress . . . then when she's sewing, there are these dots, fabric scraps, a small piece which drops onto the floor . . . And then later, when I was working as a seamstress I was remembering those days, now when I'm working and we are cutting a lot of fabric, and sometimes some of the good pieces were cut out and thrown away, I was amused, that once upon a time I was so... I was running after them and searching for those throw-away scraps [laughter]." (interviewee E)

Another feature of narrative meanings is nourished in souvenirs that are used to engage visual narratives of a nation's state to the handcrafted products and offer cultural narratives for tourism Personal and social narratives bound up with objects that encode and commercialize tradition (Moreno & Littrell 2001; Morgan & Pritchard 2005). In summary, handmade memories that put their signature on craft products, craft processes and corporal making (Luutonen 2008). These visual, verbal or kinaesthetic narratives operate as communicative tools in mediating, serving and reflecting in-person histories and past experiences. Narratives make things matter, and they deeply relate to the practices of "engaging visual culture in regard to deciphering the underlying therein contained", as Kabiito (2010, 20) envisioned.

Reflections

The purpose of this article was to examine the subjectively construed meanings of craft by providing an explanatory framework for investigating the meaning-carrying qualities of crafts. In presenting a multi-perspectival framework for the categories that portray the common kinds of meanings that crafts have, a substance that surpasses cultural boundaries is also captured due to the multicultural research setting. Therefore, a main contribution on this article is the categorization of the meanings of craft: A multi-perspectival framework for the meanings of craft suggests that even though meanings derive from the subjective setting of life, they can be identified and critically examined. It is proposed that regardless of their subjective nature, the meanings of craft can have similar inferences that transcend individual perspectives and cultural engagements.

The concept of *meaning category* also represents a new insight for the discussion relating to values and appreciations reflected in craft. In this article, meaning categories act as common names for the transcendental substance that derives from individual experiences and cultural background but transcends both. Still, it is crucial to understand that these categories do not directly imply univocality of the given meanings within a certain category; rather each category offers an overview for the variety of meanings

shaped by myriad cultural influences that they embody. Accordingly, results add to an understanding of how personalized meanings contribute to building intercultural reciprocity: since meanings of common kinds can be identified, categorized and nominated, universal human traits in the field of craft become visible. Due to these features that are able to surpass sometimes ostensible cultural boundaries, craft can be considered as a relevant tool of creating interaction and mutual understanding, and mediating and maintaining the experiences of the inherent collectivity.

To capture and qualify the extensive range of meanings that belong to the encultured context of craft, it is paramount to acknowledge the significance of lived experiences, including how one perceives being in the materialized world. Searching for the meanings of craft and categorizing then is examining both the objects of material culture and the processes making, but as well of social structures and emotions relating to them (Woodward 2007). Making is one dimension, but there are also a number of inherent traditions and meanings that are tacitly embodied in craft practices. Furthermore, the field of home-based craft closely relates closely to women's studies, material culture studies and art (Mason 2005), and due to this multidisciplinary standpoint, a process of *knitting together* the perspectives of both respondent and the interviewer required sensitivity and awareness towards dialogical reciprocity. Thereby, meanings are not simply decoded but represented and negotiated in social discourses (Berger 2009; Kabiito 2010; Mäkelä & Latva-Somppi 2011).

Another key contribution is that, due to this transcultural substance, there is obviously some relationship between individual meanings and social identities. The social dimension of making is also emphasized in the process of building bridges in experiential art (e.g. Räsänen 1997), where it is seen as a dialectic process based on subjective experiences in connection with cultural knowledge. Results of this article also suggest that a socially shared dimension is important in experiencing and placing value on crafts: People want to share things what they find meaningful in life. Although social dimension in craft making is just one possible element in making, it was highlighted in the discussion concerning the therapeutic nature of crafts within participants. As the results suggest, making crafts together, or just pursuing different hobby crafts in a shared space, truly seems to be a way to make crafts meaningful in terms of corporal making; for some people, sharing the experiences and inherent stories verbally might be equally important.

To conclude, my personal experience leads me to believe that craft can significantly contribute to discussion relating to cultural integration. The results imply that this transcendental substance which aims to enhance the understanding of the meanings embodied in crafts can have a variety of applications in contemporary craft practices relating to intercultural encounter, health and wellbeing and performative arts, just to name a few. Thus, the results still indicate a need for a further research on the mutual meanings of craft across a broad range of cultures, origins, ages, and genders. Therefore, research directions in the future are directed towards the transcendental substance and internecine comprehension in building intercultural and interpersonal bridges; to investigate the commonly shared agent in the field of craft.

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